CHAPTER - IV
FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP

Francine Prose in *Life in the global village* says, “Mystifying human complexities are ultimately far more interesting than readily grasped social problems”. Literature is like a door or a threshold of the human spirit. It forms the texture to blend with the human living and imaginative experience. A creative writer has the acuity and an analytical ability to make a remark on human life. He brings the contemporary life and history parallel to one another and portrays the complex ways how humans organise themselves, their communication skills and also the socio-cultural activities that take place in their lives. The post-colonial world has different issues that were changing from political, social and economic fields and it was difficult to come to one consensus. In *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Williams remarks, “For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that ‘naked declivity’ it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning” (114), Hence, the writers focused on humanity and human relationships which are important for a harmonious social living.

Human Relationships have always been the common threads lying in between people. When these relationships experience some sort of turmoil or disturbance, they undergo some changes and reaction, which gives rise to new dimensions to their characters. The novels thus bring this to the periphery and expose it. For human beings, society plays a very important role. It needs families to interact with one another and this interaction only results in giving various dimensions. In the Indian society, marriage plays a very important role bringing about significant changes in their families. These families live with wife and husband as the main characters who tend to show or react in different ways at different situations. Over a period of time the relation between man and woman has brought significant changes in the structure and other relationships in the family unit.

*Sister of My Heart* (1999) epitomizes the theme of female bonding. It is a story of two cousins Anju and Sudha grown up together in an Indian traditional Bengali family,
bonded from the moment of their birth till their youth, up to the age of marriage and a
with a brief separation in between, coming together for life on a foreign soil. The female
characters are pervasive of the female consciousness. The male characters lie very low
and they act like dummies in the hands of women unlike in a patriarchal society. We find
the diasporic feminine concepts on her sensibility as well as the East and West traditions.
The concept of female bonding in the novel has begun in the joint family structure, which
was common in Indian society. The joint family culture paves way for the individual to
grow up in a conducive atmosphere, which consists of grandparents, uncles, aunts,
cousins, sometimes-widowed elders and poor relatives as well. Unlike western society,
the relationship is distinct, whether it is by blood or by virtue of marriage, adoption etc.,
and it reveals the nature of the relationship. *Sister of My Heart* is a typical novel with the
traditional aspect of Indian joint family as the background.

Generally, the joint family is run by the male member leading to some sort of
trifling, among the female members who try to gain power to satisfy their ego and
ambition. But in Indian feminism the power of domination among the women, like
mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, wife and sister-in-law and even between daughter and
mother is treated against bonding, which is a contradiction to the concept of bonding.
Women bond, during the time of their needs like pregnancy, delivery, death or ailment in
the family or even in the neighborhood. Till the postcolonial period the Indian Society
was close knit. People were living in harmony irrespective of their status and relation.
But at the advent of the colonial rule, the disintegration of joint families and the western
influence have brought a rapid change in the social and economic structure of the society,
paving way to nuclear families that have become very isolated and independent. The
younger generation failed to realize the importance and advantages of joint families and
therefore are losing the bonding among them. But, there are stray incidents, where we
still find the glimpses of joint family culture in our rural areas. Divakaruni with her
tradition and experience was able to portray the theme in an authentic way.

*Sister of My Heart* depicts the concept of bonding between two generations. One
at the level of family roots, where there are three elderly women characters named
Gourima, Nalini, the mothers of Anju and Sudha and Pishi, the widowed aunt, who was
also like their mother. At the other level, it is Sudha and Anju who are young cousins and are the protagonists of the novel. They both had to be raised by those three mothers because men embraced death in a mishap on an adventure to make their fortune. It was inevitable for Gaurima who was otherwise emotionally strong to take up the responsibility of being the mistress of the house, foster Anju and Sudha as well look after the other two women, Nalini and Pishima. Gauri and Pishi happen to be sisters-in-law and there is no antagonism between the two women.

Pishi who describes it to Sudha: “Especially your Gourima, I’d known her since she came to this house as a bride of seventeen. I’d held her and comforted her in the first home sick days when she wept for her parents, just as she would hold and comfort me a few years later after my husband’s death.” (Sister:48), shows her as a very docile lady who was a emotional strength to their family.

The love and affection remains till the end of the novel in spite so many incidents of joy and sorrow. Though Nalini and her husband Gopal try to cheat Bijoy and be the cause of his death, still Gowri never confronted them, nor caused unhappiness to them. Instead the extended her support to Nalini and her daughter Sudha. She took up her responsibility and tolerate Nalini’s secretive nature and pride. The understanding between Gauri and Nalini depicts their strength to support, love and respect by creating a good bonding between them. Though Nalini had to live with them due to her helplessness, later on she realizes the genuinity in their affection they shower on her and remains loyal to them.

A woman’s life always depended upon man at every stage of her life i.e. from childhood to old age. Father, husband and son are the support system that she has to have till the end. Even in a joint family system, her role is very important, though she was not given a due place, but also treated as a marginal. Women have to undergo a lot of ordeals like dowry, female infanticide, sex, selective abortion, sexual harassment, divorce widowhood and child marriage. Only empowerment would bring a solution to all these. The heroines of the novel, Anju and Sudha brought up in a traditional joint family system in Calcutta by three mothers after their father passed away. Gourima, Nalini and Pishi, their aunt, raised them in a very traditional way.
Sudha and Anju who belong to the younger generation show strong ties till the end. Their birth on the same day in the Chatterjee’s mansion in Calcutta made them inseparable. They had the same destiny of losing their fathers on the same day. But their social status was different where Anju belonged to rich parents and Sudha to a poor relative of Anju’s father. This has brought a difference in their natures where Sudha is timid and submissive whereas Anju to be bold and outspoken. They seem to be inseparable right from the time of their births where the delivery was speeded up due to their fathers’ death that took place at the same time. At that time, Anju was born early and when Nalini had a delayed labour, Pishi places Anju on Nalini’s stomach and Anju’s cry speeds up her delivery. Sudha always feels Anju was the one who called her out into the world. “She called me out in the world.” (Sister.30)

The social status never stood in between Sudha and Anju. Anju treated Sudha a twin, a sister of heart. She always protected the life of Sudha, whether it was a fight or humiliation, at home or in the society. Her love for her was not profane and was consistent till the day of marriage. On the contrary, Sudha’s nature was different. She was guilty of their fathers’ death and especially when she came to know about Anju’s father’s death. She could not face Anju after knowing that her father was the cause of death. She gives up her decision of eloping with Ashok when Sunil’s proposal was finalised with Anju because Anju’s father-in-law, Mr. Majumdar was an orthodox person and places family reputation at a high pedestal. Sudha compromises to marry Ramesh and pay back to Anju’s family by taking that decision. Anju’s instant love for Sunil blinded her to understand him completely. A first crack appeared in Anju’s and Sudha’s life at the time of Anju’s marriage. Anju’s feelings get embittered when she notices that her husband is fatally attracted towards Sudha’s beauty and she grows jealous for the first time. “Yes for the first time in my life, I am consumed by jealousy towards Sudha, sister of my heart.” (Sister.169). She even goes to the extent of hurting Sudha who wasn’t even aware of Anju’s anger that Sunil fell in love with her. Sudha’s and Anju’s relation started to strain when we see Anju reacting in a different way which is strange to Sudha. Anju’s voice echoing in her ‘fool, fool, fool’. Yes, she was unable to realize the ulterior motive of Sunil. As Sudha pulls her hand kerchief from her waistband to wipe her face, when she puts it back, it falls to the ground behind the table…. I am about to alert her when Sunil
bends to pick it up. I am the only one who sees him slip it casually into his kurtha pocket…. and the blood pounding in my ears seems to howl with derisive laught. Fool fool fool…. I ask her, “How does it feel?” What says Sudha…? “To be married? No. To have my husband crazily in love with you,” I say bitterly. (Sister 169) This takes Sudha by surprise and her efforts to clear the misunderstanding of her cousin fails. However, the air in between them was cleared when Anju leaves to America, to her new home. Their bond revives and in spite of the objections by their husbands and in-laws, they keep their bond of love alive.

Coincidently, they both conceive at the same time and Sudha was blessed with a baby girl. Anju was expected to have a boy, but the pregnancy gets terminated and that was the time when Anju needed Sudha more by her side. After being a mother Sudha, could understand the craving of Anju for a child. Again, the crisis surfaces in Sudha’s life in the form of a threat of abortion of her baby, planned by her mother-in-law and husband. Panicked, Sudha was advised by Anju to go back to her parent’s house but her own mother Nalini does not accept her though Gouri and Pishi support and shelter Sudha. Her child is also rescued when she is divorced from her husband. Sudha was invited to America to have a new life in spite of Sunil’s protests. Anju starts working to save money for Sudha’s comfortable life in America. Anju’s trauma was understood by Sudha who comforts her over the phone and gives her an impetus to live. Anju decides to bring Sudha and finally succeeds in bringing Sudha and her daughter to America. Thus, they both survive all patriarchal obstructions and hassles in a happy note. Thus, the story depicts two generations of women in standing against the society and against the patriarchy. It also highlights the ways in which the joint family system is a source of great strength.

A TIME TO BE HAPPY is Sahgal’s first novel. The central character of the novel is the narrator, a young middle-aged man who provides lives to many of the characters in the novel. He involves himself directly or indirectly with important personages and events. The members of the Shirpal and Sahai family play the main characters whose opinions and experience form the crux of the novel. Sharanpur, where they live, is a medium sized town. The radical changes that had been taking place throughout India
during the first decade after independence, had tried to penetrate into the lives of the complacent, age-old tradition-bound people.

According to Sahgal, her parents were responsible for their union and the marriage lasted for fifty years harmoniously. Though it had all the normal skirmishes, ups and downs, they were compatible and knew how to adjust to those small or big issues which are quite common in any family. Sometimes we need to pretend even if all is not well. This will only fill the gaps of the cracks without making them wide open. “They were wonderfully to each other. Inspite of their disagreements and there must have been some in a marriage that lasted fifty years, they adjusted to each other foibles, maintaining an outward harmony that controlled the rhythm of the entire household.” (ATime. 6). Sahgal is conservative, not a puritan or an aggressive feminist. Her protagonists gradually evolved and especially, the later novels have shown women taking some path breaking steps, which were against the Hindu Marriage Codes.

The marriage of Harish turned out to be a great mistake committed by him. His tastes and inclinations do not make his wife an equal partner even in all her social gatherings. Her interests in life are different. She is not inclined to learn dance, play tennis or could converse with the European friends. She was stiff not shy. The author criticizes the non-acceptance of Indian women in their resistance in adopting the western culture. She takes pride in her ‘character’, lacing rigidity in her traditional attitude and who would disapprove the aped notions and customs that reflect in his behaviour and even she wouldn’t hesitate to chide him for his superfluity. She has set up a different notion for ‘character’ or acceptable behaviour especially in the elite society.

The relationship between a man and woman needn’t only be sexual. A comforting touch, a caress wouldn’t only lead to the urgency to its consummation but also would bring comfort to the mind and body. Real love means reaching to a domain beyond the experience of sex. That is the true province of love, understanding, compassion and empathy or just friendship. Sahgal’s perception towards this sort of perception might bring a sort of awareness among who would see woman as sex objects. These sort of soft feelings would arouse the true feeling of joy. The author speaks from the words of the narrator when the identifies the hurt child in Maya – “It was one thing to think of
comforting her, and quite another to caress her soft black hair, electric to the touch, to feel one’s hand slip down her cheek, fly back again to her hair, and be caught in the bewildering discovery that his hair, this face under one’s hand were infinitely dear.” (A.Time. 66).

The narrator’s deep understanding, the conflicts and emotions faced by Maya, his effortless exploration into the crevices, beyond the body and mind are tuned in unison with his own. This does not culminate into a clandestine relationship keeping in mind the social set up prevailing in India to which Maya always yielded. Her prerogatives are not to breakaway the age-old stigmas and sentiments. Her dissuasive attempt by remaining cold to the narrator, made him understand that their future will be hollow without her companionship.

It is believed that where a man and a woman discover themselves as a perfect match, they have to cross so many barriers that cannot be set aside without producing so much heat that brings distinction to themselves but also to their dear ones. The narrator’s and Maya love ends in such a tragedy. Narrator’s explanation to his mother on remaining single convinces her and she supports that instead of living a meaningless life with a person who doesn’t respond to one’s feeling or understand each other, living alone brings a greater solace, by not being pressurized to live a life of hypocrisy, it gives at least freedom and can remain true to himself. As an experienced woman, his mother was able to understand his conviction better.

Govind Narayn Sanad’s father, who still lives in the era of Nawabs, leads the same old life and doesn’t want any change in his routine. He feels all changes that were taking place as his personal enemy, plundering his peace. Sanad’s brother, Girish, is a young successful director of a company. Children were married at a young age and they grew together. Physical appearances were given little importance compared with wifely virtues. At the age of fifty they adjusted to each other’s foibles, maintained an outward harmony that controlled the smooth harmony of the entire household. The parents were too positive instead of complaining, they remained stoic and continued to live under compulsion so that the family bonds will remain intact and set a good example to their children. On the contrary, this lacks in today’s generation. But his father’s unorthodox
behaviour rubbed on to his son who became a rebel in a small way. Inspired by Gandhi’s national movement, he felt it was a clarion call for him to live in a village and not inherit his father’s legacy. He was happy to have treasured his privacy and freedom, though his cousins flourished in their business.

“Harish’s single mistake had been to marry a woman who could not be a graceful hostess to his European friends. Maya had never learned to dance or play tennis…..” (A Time. 18) Harish was criticized for marrying a woman who could not be graceful to his European friends. Maya was not able to fit into the social set up of her husband Sahgal which brings the contrast in the couple just to show how marriage was performed between two people with poles apart culture. The existing culture was demanding more of the British eticasies or social etiquettes, which were a priority at that time.

Ammaji, Govind Narayan’s mother, was the only member of Shivapal family who did not summon a servant to do what she could easily do herself. This woman believed in herself and still continued with conviction in the traditions. Ammaji was never in support of gifting children expensive gifts. She was not in favour of the western ways of education that is given in India and she complains that Indians are losing their roots. She was very meticulous in her work and always took great care and interest in the domestic affairs. She had a men-like disdain for luxury. Her stubborn refusal to yield to the indent, pleasure loving husband’s attempts to mould in which he had tried to cast, her talks about her conviction. She had to face a lot of criticism of all that she disapproved of, in her husband and his home. Though her husband died, his traits are inherited in Harish who was like a mockery to her where she has to only wait and watch at things that were not in her control.

“They shouldn’t have Christmas presents “Lakshmi protested. “As it is, they get too many at Dusshera and divali…..” (A Time. 27) Lakshmi, Govind Narayan’s wife was a woman of discipline who felt that children should not be pampered and spoilt. She kept European influences at bay especially, where the matters of religion are concerned. The Christmas day picnic was completely a bad idea for Ammaji but Govind it was a sensible way to set about and carry all that one needs. “For Govind Nayaran picnic was an outing but that was the only way in which it differed from spending the day at home”. (A. Time
Indian women after a certain age become philosophic and feel that they are not meant for other age group. Women are so conservative that they both (Lakshmi and Maya) go out on a picnic with their in sarees but Harish with his European outlook set out in an appropriate attire suited to a picnic. Here the contrast in the ways the two generations think is well shown. Sahgal brings about a close demarcation where the youngsters quietly blend with the European life style, but the older generations strongly cling to their roots and wouldn’t budge from their conservative thoughts. “Only Harish was suitably dressed for a picnic, in flannels and a blue blazer’ Maya’s and Lakshmi’s silk saris, ballooning about their legs in the breeze made no concession to a day in open air, and Govind Narayan was, as usual, in Pyjama-Kurtas.” (A. Time. 29). “I don’t know why you women don’t wear slacks,” said Harish shortly irritated by his mother’s rebuff. “It would be so much more sensible.” “Who wants to be sensible when one can be pretty?” Lakshmi asked (A Time. 29).

Maya, wife of Harish is quite contrast to Lakshmi, the wife of Govind Narayana. Lakshmi is more into elite circle, adapting to European style of life whereas as Maya still remains to her age-old ways, whether it’s social life or dressing. Maya prefers to work in a village teaching people the art of spinning a wheel. Harish’s affluence with the elite group might embarrass him to see his wife work with the rural community. “Maya wants to work in a village.”…”It is embarrassing for Harish with her getting mixed up in the congress programme.” (A Time. 32) People like Lakshmi felt that joining music, circle or a literary society or something he would approve of would be a better choice. The choice what Maya made doesn’t go well with Lakshmi. Though Maya was not well versed with the act of spinning, she was more determined to follow her heart rather than lead a hypocritical life in the name of culture and sophistication, unlike Lakshmi the other daughter-in-law of the house. Even when compared to her husband Harish, Maya was a subdued person whereas Harish was flamboyant in his nature. This was clearly perceived during the wedding day in the attires they wore. Harish was a total replica of the European ways, whereas Maya was in her unsophisticated appearance. Though their marriage lasted for many years, yet it was sterile lacking in fragrance or the productivity inherent in a living breathing plant. People, like the narrator felt the day Maya got married to Harish and her misfortune had started. Sahgal criticizes the apathy of snobbish
rich who would not understand the sufferings of the poor or efforts of the good intentions of people like Maya.

Maya’s disinterestedness in life can be due to her inability to have children. She even stopped observing Diwali at home. She explained that Diwali had to be celebrated in a house where there are children, where there are elders, a house well balanced by youth and age, where righteous spirits were tempered by wisdom and prayer. Sahgal depicts the importance of motherhood and how a woman feels when she cannot have one. Life would be meaningless and no wealth can compensate this vacuum of barrenness.

The narrator recollects the day of Harish’s wedding where the bride sat coyly and did not even dare to have a glimpse of her husband covering from head to toe. She is an embodiment of her docile nature. Sahgal criticizes the pathetic condition of the Indian brides in those days where they were not even allowed to see the groom. It was customary in Indian marriages where girls did not have any choice and they are supposed to abide by the decisions of the parents or elders.

Harish’s expectations did not match with Maya’s disposition. The narrator could perceive the marriage in a positive way but on the contrary, it has drifted the couple away from each other. They hardly experienced many passions but they were fulfilling up their duties for all practical purposes. The author criticizes the vacuum that is created in between the married couple who lived quietly surrendering themselves to destiny and society choking their longings and wishes failing to have no courage to break the shackles of their bondage in the name of tradition. According to Sahgal, a woman is a separate entity but not a projection of her husband. A woman or an individual for that matter can evolve with maturity only in an orbit of freedom. This novel stresses on individual freedom.

The narrator was unable to understand why people who were apparently suited to each other could not find compatibility in their married lives. He wondered, “Were in fact, as remote from each other as strangers.” (A Time. 40). Sahgal emphasizes this sort of situations occur when they fail to understand each other. The philosophical discussion that took place between the narrator and Maya who quoted the lines from The Bhagawad
Gita, only reflect the stoic silence of most of the Indian women who faced many problems in the name of injustice and disparity. The lines spoken by Maya, “Is the human counterpart of the ocean as limitless as nature’s ocean? Or will it like the river, feel the need one day to overflow its boundaries towards a larger reservoir?” (A Time 42). Sahgal portrays the weight of anguish in Maya, which is like that of a limitless patience that is unique in a human being or will it be allowed to overflow the boundaries, towards a larger reservoir. But on the contrary the Gita says that man should endeavour to become like an ocean into which the rivers flow but remain calm in the face of their turbulence.

Sahgal brings a balance required between the relationship of man and woman where they come together, when they marry. Sahgal says how modesty in women which unnaturally leads to vexation, giving room to general animosity towards all that is normal and beautiful. The portrayal of Maya in the novel is just not to epitomize sacrifice and remain committed to a cause. She is openly against a formidable personality like Gandhi or abide by the traditional concept of selfless sacrifice. She boldly says that ‘response’ of any kind not necessarily a favourable one but just a response is very important. For some it doesn’t matter whether his wife is alive or not. Maya asks the narrator once: “What is the most important thing in life?” (A Time. 65). In a forsaken voice she responses, “Not a good one, or approving one, necessarily, is just a response of any kind. Even whether we live or die is not important to someone.” (A Time. 66).

Mrs. Sahgal’s career as a novelist spans a period of over 30 years, beginning with her first novel A Time to be Happy (1958) which is clearly set in the first half of the 20th century. It is a fictional enactment of the growth and maturation of the young. It has Westernised and wealthy individual Indian, against the backdrop of India’s struggle for independence on one hand, and the smug nonchalance of the British Indian Officers and their wives as well as their Indian admirers, on the other. It is also on a different level, a submerged saga of Indian National Movement with its inevitable and indelible prints on the minds of countless comfortable upper-middle class Indians. The novel is an imaginative recapitulation of things of the past with somewhat ambiguous attitude towards the present, be it the freedom struggle or the Indo-British relation. This ambivalence Mrs. Sahgal achieves by using the point of view of an intermittently
omniscient observer – a middle-aged bachelor who narrates the story with forward and backward jumps in time.

The locale is for most of the time, Sharanpur a small town whose line of fortune is the textile industry, mostly owned by the British and a couple of rich Indian business houses, namely, those of the narrator and Sir Harilal Mathur. The narrator at times shuttles between Lucknow and Sharanpur.

Calcutta, which by a curious concatenation of events exerts a chastening influence on the protagonist, is represented as a city of Bohemian life, moral turpitude, intolerable squalor, unashamed snobbery and commercial callousness. Sharanpur adapts itself to the avalanche of changes in the forties, while Lucknow symbolizes a decadent cultural value structure. The image of incongruity due to the superimposition of the English culture on the Indian cultural situation is sustained by Mrs. Sahgal throughout the novel with commendable concentration and unobtrusive descriptions.

Nayantara Sahgal’s narrative technique takes us back and forth not only in regard to the sequence of events but also concerning the honeycomb of human relations. Thus the narrator’s own story is mixed with, what he himself avows to be, “really Sanad’s Story.” The historical and the personal strands in the story are dexterously interwoven. Sanad’s marriage to Kusum coincides with the of India’s Independence in 1947. It also marks a total historical change, which in its turn affects the pattern of relationships.

The first novel of Sahgal (1958) projects woman’s liberation from the bondage of marriage and social conventions. It projects the long myth of female servitude, which is perpetuated by male hegemony, which ironically borders on the marginalization of a woman’s social sphere of existence. It also exposes the reasons forcing for being responsible to create that crisis in woman’s identity. She shows in reality the position of woman that she has no place in a patriarchal set up. The human relationships are not just peripheral, but also of central interest to both the writers chosen for study. The innermost psyche of the protagonists is revealed through their interaction where they are emotionally related to them on the basis of kinship. Changes that have taken place
immediately after independence, the socio-economic conditions that have changed the patriarchal and this contemporary change have reflected in the stories.

In our society, the girl along with her family has to endure any amount of humiliation and tolerate the hypocrisies of the male dominated atmosphere. If they bear this suffering, they can live peacefully and understand that they cannot challenge the existing social norms. Sahgal has a clear understanding of the social life in India during the freedom movement. Independence was only superficial but the core aspects or the attitudes to love, morality, sex, marriage, education, religion and the position of woman remained conventional. Modernity was superficial in their fashions, life style and manners by the concept of marriage remained the same.

The institution of marriage is an important central part of the society. Marriage is considered as a holy reunion of two souls, which forms the foundation of family. According to Simon de Beauvoir’s Second Sex “No doubt marriage can afford certain material and sexual conveniences it frees the individual from loneliness, it establishes him securely in Space and time by giving him a home and children; it is a definitive fulfilment of his existence”(421). Hence, according to the Hindu belief, wife is known as ‘ardhang’ or ‘sahadharmini’, which emphasizes her equality and oneness with the husband. Marriage emphasizes on companionship and mutual understanding.

Man and Woman have to live together under any circumstances and divorce was a taboo. They have to live together no matter how unhappy and confining their marriages had been. The protagonist (Time) Maya feels uprooted and abandoned in the male dominated world as no one sees and understands her point of view, even her husband Harish fails to see her as a person seeking freedom and fulfilment. Sahgal seems to deeply be concerned with the need of freedom for woman. Kusum and Maya are two women who wanted to be self-dependent and enjoy individuality. Maya didn’t want an identification with her husband’s identity. She was successful in etching out her own identity outside the bondage of marriage. She stared at her life from a new perspective. Man’s materialistic attachment has totally washed out the human feelings and emotions from his heart. There are some women who are not strong enough to protest against these evils in the society but silently accept them. Sahgal doesn’t support this sort of women.
Thus, the novel is a powerful explication of woman’s predicament in a traditionally patriarchal social set up in which a free play of male chauvinism continues to jeopardize female identity by damaging the image of women. The struggle is to seek equal opportunities and give expression to her individuality. The couple Maya and Harish Sanad and Kusum shows how a woman struggles to give expression to her individuality without injuring the piety of the confines of domesticity and conjugal harmony.

Parallel to these, run the stories of the narrator’s mother who is at once a traditionalist and the Mathurs and the Chatterji’s of Tom Grange and his wife Mora. The novel has a large number of characters being divided into two groups those having, anglicized background include Govind Narayan’s brother. Harish, his two sons, the Chatterjis, Sir Harilal Mathur, a big business magnate of Sharanpur, the other group is comprised of the Sahai family, a Co-political prisoner of the narrator. Sohan Bhai and the narrator himself, their vision is forged in the Gandhian ideals in the wake of the freedom struggle movement. Nayantara draws a line to evidently explain their slowed vision and philosophy of life in terms of the materialistic considerations of life. The women characters too fall into two groups, the first includes those 4 women who have been cast into the mould of Hindu Orthodoxy since their childhood and they seek happiness in total acceptance without questioning, the second group who in the midst of mechanism of naturalistic environment, try to adjust to the changing circumstances but finding the whole universe structured on the principle of male-dominance, betray shades of rebellion. Their struggle is a plain refusal to be equated with the under privileged groups like the minority races in their own homes. They make a bid to liberate themselves from male oppression and promote the ideals of self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-respect by breaking down the male stereotypes.

In the novel, the action begins and ends on a symbolic note signifying the end of an era and a new beginning. It also deals with the East-West encounter, the impact of English on Western education, the burning desire for identity and roots, marriage and Hinduism, apart from man woman relationships in the course of marriage, which emerge in the novel. Sanad’s relation with his wife Kusum is very different as she belongs to a middle-class background. Their marriage has a large abyss between Sanad’s family and
that of Kusum’s father a Professor and four brothers who were directly involved in the independence movement, but Kusum is a silent transformation from one world to the other. She does not show any quality of conflict, rebellion or bitterness in her. She establishes in the house in the way she wanted to and is happy in her own inexpensive and quiet world, totally different from the aristocratic grandeur of her mother-in-law’s house. Finally, Sanad and Kusum discover each other because they have explored the truth about themselves.

The novel ‘A Time to be Happy’ shows the marriages of the three couples are arranged ones. Govind Narayan’s parents and the narrator’s parents are first generation people. The narrator’s father and his wife wonderfully complement each other. She was orthodox in her belief and felt “like any good Hindu wife believed that his concern was with God and her’s with God in him.” (A Time 5). But Govind Narayan’s mother Ammaji and her husband belong to two different worlds. Her husband always indulges and his wife lives in a saintly way made to appear contrast to each other. Though Ammaji used to criticise and disapprove of her husband’s behaviour, she knew that marriage is a permanent bond and those who do not adjust with all this jerks will always remain unhappy.

Govind Narayan’s wife Lakshmi and his brother Harish whose wife is Maya belonged to the second generation. Lakshmi could be stable and strong with her marriage as they had affection and mutual reward unlike Maya wife of Harish had the incompatibility, unable to forsake her individuality in the family of the rich Harish’s affluent life style and Maya’s simplicity never made them a happy couple. They were quite in contrast to their perceptions; outlook and attitude towards life hence they led isolated lives. Her childlessness also made her lonely and left her in pall of gloom. Sanad, Kusum, Girish and Devika belong to the third generation of couples. Though Girish admires his uncle Harish and Devika always, tries to please her husband never had friction in their married life. Though Sanad is very anglicized in his behaviour falls in love with Kusum who is from a nationalised background. Though they are in contrast to each other, yet there is no much of a conflict between them. They work for the success of their marriage and lead happy lives. The couple Maya and Harish, Sanad and Kusum
show how a woman struggles to give expression to her individuality without injuring the piety of the confines of domesticity and conjugal harmony.

Narrative Technique used by Chitra Banerjee chooses alternate voices of Sudha and Anju, which shows a constant shifting of the perspective which highlights each of their characters where we find Anju’s voice is always with clarity and mostly avoids ambiguity. Anju being richer and also more capable of the two but less imaginative who always felt that Sudha has to be taken under her wings. Her sacrificing nature, even to forego Sunil and stand by her, projects her sister-friend quality to thrive. Chitra’s careful strategy of concluding the novel with an appropriate conclusion, showing a clear understanding of the life they have chosen. The life of woman and the predicaments faced by women are universally the same but it only varies in the atmosphere they are living. Chitra makes the reader notice that the problems and situations women are exposed to, are same as anywhere else.

Discussing the mother and daughter relationship, Simon De Beauvoir observes:” the daughter is for the mother atone her double and another person ---- she saddles her child with her own desitiny: away of reverging herself for it.” (Second sex 309). Simon De Beauvoir, The second sex transanded .H.M.Parshley the quotes affirm this in the 1953: rpy. Harmonds worth : penguin ), (309) the novel in the depicting the anxiety of a mother and the other widow women in the family who have all their dreams on their children and would like to see them placed differently in a better position, all the three fixed their goal and raised Sudha and Anju with these notions in their minds. But they only become stronger with the social conditions they live in. Sudha and Anju come together where their binding factor is Sudha’s daughter Dayita who has also become a saving grace to this women. The last lines in the novel give an optimistic conclusion where they decide to continue their journey. They both travelled the valley of sorrow together “If a passer-by who had the eyes to notice such things looked at us, she would see that we have formed a tableau, two women, their aims intertwine like lotus stalks, smiling down at the baby between them….Madon Das with Child”. (Sister. 347).

Chitra Banerjee could analyse deeply the theme of human relationships where she focuses on alienation and communication in married life. The portrayal of the Majumdar
family throws light on the expectations and realities that suppress women where one can see when Mrs. Majumdar is ill-treated by her husband. He says to his wife, “Haven’t I told you, never to make that unhealthy stuff… Haven’t I told you, I can’t stand the smell? Who pays for the food you eat in this house? Answer me (Sister .182). She doesn’t utter a word and we can see how she trembles out of fear and accepts his domination and one upmanship in the house without uttering a word. But for Majumdar wife is a slave. He always expects her to be obedient and sees to that her disposition always makes him happy – “She bends her head and speaks in a watery whisper, or hunches her shoulders apologetically and she rushes to fetch what he is shouting for. He shouts a lot, Sunil’s father. I think he enjoys it.” (Sister 180). He never sees her as a human being but only as a slave to do service to him. “He enjoys quoting derogatory passages about women from the Hindu scriptures….women and gold are the root of evil” (Sister.181). She was a loyal wife who never bore grudge against him even at the time of death but conducted the funeral service all alone, bravely but could not suffer the separation and has confined to bed, which the reader can observe in the sequel Vine of Desire.

Sudha faced the predicament, which is similar to the post-modern women. It is commonly faced by the souls stuck between the cross rounds of tradition and modernity. Her life projects certain aspects of conventional patterns of life, which are grisly and torturous where one urges to tear apart all the limitations and elude into a world where one can find everything replete with variety, glory and adventure. The novelist projects the stronger side of women in these two protagonists who do not sit and cry over their destiny but were able to see the other side of their lives and were able to reject the patriarchal norms and they craft the rules of the new female universe by gifting a ruby to Dayitha which was bequeathed from Sudha’s father. They explore the length and breadth of India and the readers see them adapting themselves to their newfound world. The conventional traits though are hard to be broken which has confined them to their earlier lives, it was also difficult to resolve the psychological conflict that comes with the new situation.
Chitra’s vivid portrayal of the Indian Women dilemmas in a traditional society is reflections of the sentiments of women who are confined to the traditional bounds within and outside. Her themes on sisterhood were squarely in the tradition of West rather than that of India. As some reader opines her fiction seems to be a growing corpus of Asian American Women’s writing major theme of the first or second generation Asian immigrant in an often hostile, uncomprehending and incomprehensible environment, struggling to assimilate and keep their ethnic identity alive at the same time, suffering the double yoke of colour and gender even more than the African American, for whom more than the African American, for whom the USA has always been the only home she has ever known. The portrayal of sister friend in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Sister of My Heart* is a good example. Her writings throw light on women’s friendship which strikes a balance with the conflicting passions and demands that women face when they play different roles as mothers, wives, lovers and daughters. The friendship with women is different as each one experience different challenges at various milestones of their lives right from puberty, childbirth or menopause. In an interview as quoted by Lalitha.R. “The force behind her writing is the desire to put women in the Centre of Stories, to have their voices, be the voices of interpretation, their eyes the ones that we sell through. There just hasn’t been enough of that in the world, if you look back at literary history.”

Lalitha.R. ‘Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: A Rising Star in the Diasporic Literature’ (21-26)

Feminism paves way for the concept of womanhood. The traditional note of the woman in the patriarchal society is always understood in connection with the male. She has no identity of her own but it is venerated as a mother in relation to the father, as a sister in a relation to her brother, as a wife in relation to her husband and as a daughter in relation to her father. Susan S. Wadhey’s views expressed in “Women and The Hindu Tradition” are worth notice here: “Classical Hindu laws focus almost exclusively on women as wives”. Role models and the norms for mothers, daughters, sisters, are more apt to appear in folk lore and vernacular traditions. Furthermore, most written traditions emphasize women’s behaviour in relationship to men: wife/husband; mother/son; daughter/father; sister/brother. “Role models for female behaviour concerning other femals (mother/daughter; sister/sister; mother-in-law/daughter-in-law; husband’s
sister/wife are common themes in folk lore and oral traditions but not in the more authoritative religious literature.” (117).

Family is an integral part of any society in the world. Family members are the ones who stand for each other at the time of distress and disturbance. Even in a new place, there can be bliss in an individual if the family member stands by her. Hence, one should agree with Thapan (38) “Women no doubt struggle with social and familial definitions and expectations, and experience. Conflict and dilemmas as they struggle to redefine and shape their identities in different contexts and situations which is very true in the novels where the Sahgal and Chitra show the protagonists Maya, Sudha and Anju as good examples”. Sudha, who marries Ramesh, takes care of the family with lot of responsibility. She was ready to do all the household work to win her husband’s heart but he is always “quieter.” But she was disturbed by her first love Ashok’s thoughts as she doesn’t get that enough love from her husband Ramesh. Her failure to share the cordial relationship with her husband makes her think of the past and her first love. She makes her married life move on with the amount of sacrifices and services she makes for the family reflect in the lines,” I float on this pool. I know I am needed; I know I am liked. And so I am not happy.” (Sister.199). Sudha feels anguished when she fails to conceive. She was taunted by her mother-in-law when she was unable to conceive. Sudha could not question the virility of her husband, but undergo treatment without her mother-in-laws knowledge. Though she felt that to love her in-laws was her primary responsibility, it was an uphill task as there was no reciprocation from them. Sudha’s husband though was an efficient boss, yet he is “like a leaf in a gale” (217) in front of his mother. Sudha’s mother-in-law’s brought him up in such a way that he does not dare to defy his mother. He used to shut himself up in the library and this left the pregnant Sudha to her own contrivances to protect the unborn child. These have intensified the angst of her mind.

The two authors when compared, their literature is one force, which goes beyond man-made barriers. It establishes that the human nature remains the same everywhere. As readers, one can perceive the commonness of the human psyche that has been exhibited by the writers in spite of different cultures they adapted. Chitra being a diasporic writer could also assimilate the culture of a foreign country. Sahgal though lived in an alien
country for sometime could comprehend and continue to have the grip on Indian mindset where she project her protagonists suffer initially and try to endure which was beyond a certain point but wanted to have anchors to rest and move on with their lives, unlike Chitra who showed that women moved to a different level where they were able to live life on their own terms without any man in their later parts of their lives. She also projected the parents of the protagonists as strong and independent characters who learnt to live their lives and also succeed to become entrepreneurs like Nalini in *Sister of My Heart*.

The older generation women Nalini, gauri and Pishi act as moral forces to protect or safeguard the marriage of the girls in the family. Sudha who wants to snap off the relationship with her husband wanted a new identity for herself and wanted to live without her husband. Hence, she accepts the invitation of Sunil. Jasbir Jain points out that a nationalist allegory makes woman’s body her sexuality Vs a sexuality and motherhood a central issue. “Struggle sacrifice and self-denial are seen as necessary part of womanhood (*Second Sex.* 654). Anju’s surrender to her husband as there was no choice as Simon de Beauvoir says about woman’s attachment towards her man”. For she was fond of him; she loved and admired and respected him tremendously better than anyone else in the world “*Second Sex*” (448). Sunil took care and attention of Anju. Initially she was reserved and felt lonely but later realized he was not that rigid. Das Gupta, the writer says that the anxiety felt by first generation Asian Indians who strongly believe in gender equality is easily understood (80). Anju’s adaptability to the situation makes her husband appreciate and realize Anju’s beauty where she immediately changes her opinions and starts loving him. This is the vulnerability of a woman who will easily yield to their husband’s sincere over tunes. This made their married life blossom till Sudha arrived. But there was void in their relation, till Sunil gets attracted to Sudha. She experiences emotional starvation in their marriage where he slowly starts drifting away from her. Though Sunil tries to conceal his feelings for Sudha, his behaviour with Anju, makes him expose his true self, where she senses and confirms that his first love is Sudha – “Gone without Kissing me like he always does when he is leaving, gone without saying he’ll be back.” (*Sister.*213).
This chapter of comparative study is an extension and intensification of healthy critical procedures adopted by readers of literature in all periods and cultures. Both the writers differ in their approach. They deal with the familial bonds, with the social issues in the West and the East interpreting their variation in terms of life, love and marriage. They both live in different places, one in America and the other in India. Both of them viewed their characters crystal clearly and have ultimately proved women to be in their chosen homelands and their peace often seems to be ephemeral. Nayantara Sahgal and Chitra dealt with various aspects of love, marriage, money and views them calmly and dispassionately. The novelists opined, a woman seeks companionship as a wife and man is after his own well-being or for selfish desires. Woman expects understanding, togetherness and affectionate communication that which is denied. But he doesn’t think what the woman wants. His desires and pleasures have to be fulfilled without the will of his wife. His is a priority. Women are tender and sensitive who would not express openly what they want but suffer inwardly, which leads to depression and makes her neurotic. The sensitive nature of a woman always suffers in the ruthless, narrow-minded hands. She always faces this loneliness and emptiness that leads to boredom.